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LETTERS | WE'RE GETTING A CRASH COURSE IN HOW TO RELATE

St. Paul's graduates want to provide a different picture of their school

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THE REPORTED sexual assault that occurred on our campus last spring was shocking and upsetting, and we struggled as a school to comprehend how such a thing could happen in our community. Yet news stories about the matter, sensationalized by provocative headlines and charged phrases such as “rape culture,” “misogyny,” and “elitism,” became a feeding frenzy that left a distorted image of student culture here. The St. Paul's that has been portrayed is not the same school we know and love. As members of the class of 2015, we want to provide a different picture.

St. Paul's is not perfect, nor is it impervious to the problems surrounding hierarchy, relationships, and gender that all high schools face. However, the faculty, students, and administration work constantly to confront these issues and improve campus culture. During our time at St. Paul's, schoolwide meetings, guest speakers, and student-faculty committees helped open avenues of meaningful dialogue about gender-related issues. Together we worked to create a thriving institution that defines itself not by hierarchical structures, but by kindness, diversity, respect, and personal growth.

Unfortunately, the media have cast our school in a very different light, seizing one example of fleeting vernacular as confirmation of a universally unhealthy relationship culture. This notion is flawed in several ways. First, the term “senior salute,” contrary to salacious assumptions, is used to describe any romantic

sexual intercourse or any type of competition. Further, this term is not some deeply rooted tradition but rather a phrase that arose in the past few years and is dissolving from student vocabulary just as quickly. Finally, we have not seen evidence that sexual activity at St. Paul's exceeds or differs significantly from such interaction at any other high school.

Many articles are drawing a connection between elitism and sexual assault at our school, transforming a widespread issue into a "prep school" one. Sexual misconduct is a universal problem, and characterizing it as singular to one school ignores the need for thoughtful discussions on the subject in other communities. Moreover, those who blame the reported event on wealth and privilege overlook the fact that a large portion of the St. Paul's student body receives financial aid; Owen Labrie was on scholarship himself.

We have witnessed how our school strives to support diversity in all its forms and works to ensure that its members are treated with the equity and respect that all people — girl or boy, senior or freshman — deserve.

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The writers also speak for a number of other members of the 2015 graduating class.

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